

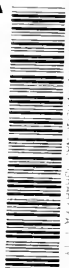
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KING EDWARD THE
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King Edward the Seventh.

MEMORIAL SERMON

BY

RABBI DR. J. H. HERTZ.

אשריך ארץ שכלך בן־חורים

—Ecclesiastes X, 17.

—FRIDAY—

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אשריך ארץ שכלך ביהורים "Happy art thou. O land, whose king is a free man." (Eccl. X. 17). This Scriptural verse is the key that will disclose to us the world-historical significance of him who is to-day being laid to rest amid the sorrowing sympathy of all nations. True, this is not a text that suggests lamentation or wailing. If however, we consider the briefness of King Edward's reign and his royal record of work achieved, even our grief at his swift summons into eternity cannot prevent us from feeling that lamentation is indeed uncalled for. Instead, by centering our attention upon the personality of King Edward as a ruler, as a man, our text will help us to a realisation of what the British Empire has lost in the passing of our great Sovereign; we may learn the secret of his hold upon the affections of the civilised world; we may obtain a glimpse of the place he is destined to occupy in the pages of history.

In the Hebrew original our text reads: "Happy art thou, O land, whose king is a *son of free men*." And it is this pre-eminence as the offspring of a free race and free institutions, that compels us to regard him as the ideal British king, nay more, as the ideal king of the Biblical writers. For the close affinity between the Hebrew and the British ideals of kingship is also evidenced

by the persistent struggle of both nations for a law-abiding ruler. Let us first turn to the Bible, if we would grasp the unique qualities which have distinguished King Edward's kingship from all others. The Bible is for all time the sacred source of the spirit of human liberty. Even an agnostic like Huxley could realise that the Bible was the "Magna Charta of the poor and the oppressed"; and could declare, in respect to the Jewish State founded upon the Torah, that "down to modern times no state had a constitution in which the interests of the common people were so largely taken into account, in which the *duties* so much more than the *privileges* of rulers were insisted upon." The Jewish king was bound to respect the liberty, the honour, and the property of his subjects; and his power was strictly limited by the fundamental laws of the Torah. Listen to the words of the Law-giver (Deut. xvii., 10-20), "And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book; and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may keep all the words of this law; and that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren." The vigilance of the Prophets, throughout Jewish history, against every kind of abuse perpetrated by the brute-force of king or noble, was ceaseless. Samuel warns the tribes of Israel against the ways of the Eastern despot; Nathan the Prophet hurls his, "Thou art the man!" at the royal sinner; and Elijah beards Ahab

as the latter proceeds to take possession of the vineyard of the murdered Naboth. Prophets, sages, psalmists and seers, all cherish the Messianic dream that days are coming when the king will be a shepherd to his people, when the king's sceptre will be a sceptre of peace, and upon him shall rest the spirit of wisdom and counsel and and fear of the Lord.

In all history there is only one parallel to this Jewish hope for a king who should be a son of Freedom and a prince of Peace, a hope for ever coupled with fearless opposition to rulers whose strivings were merely for personal and dynastic power—and that parallel is furnished by the English people. For if anything can be more remarkable than the unanimity with which the British people to-day cling to and reverence the Throne, it is the age-long conflict waged between People and Crown on the soil of England. As soon as the Crown had fulfilled its vital and inestimable work of unifying the nation, a bitter struggle began for freedom, and it lasted for over five centuries. Truly does the poet sing :

" All we have of freedom, all we use or know—

" This our fathers bought for us long ago.

" Lance and torch and tumult, steel and grey-goose wing

" Wrenched it, inch and ell and all, slowly from the King

" Till our fathers 'stablished, after bloody years,

" How our King is one with us, first among his peers."

Now this transformation of the absolute monarch of a barbaric age who could say, "The State, I am the State," into the king of a modern democracy, who is the first among a nation of peers, who recognises loyalty to the laws of his country as his highest duty, and the service of his people the divine right and privilege of a king—this process of transformation had reached its culmination in King Edward VII. On his accession he announced, "I shall be a constitutional monarch in the strictest sense of the words," and nobly has he proved himself *the free king of a free people*. He reigned over half the earth and all the seas, with a mild sovereignty that was as gentle, as unfelt and unseen, and yet as real as is the moon's attraction for the waters of the ocean. No wonder that by his life he greatly increased the dignity and the worth of the royal office, and measurably enhanced its influence. Broad-based on the people's will, the Crown is to-day the symbol of Imperial unity, above all political parties and trusted by all. It is the fountain of honour and national gratitude, the nucleus of everything that is best and highest in the national life—a vast force for moral and social good. Verily, happy is that land whose kings are the nurslings of Liberty, the sons of Freedom.

We have so far spoken of King Edward as a ruler. But his pre-eminent political gifts, no matter how interesting to the student of liberty, would never alone explain

his boundless popularity, the affection that hundreds of millions of his fellow-men held him in when he was still with us ; neither would they account for the feeling of personal loss, as of a dear friend, which pervades this world-wide sorrow, now that he has left the pathway of life and entered the abode of everlasting peace. This affection could have been inspired only by King Edward *the man*. Early in life he won all hearts by his simplicity, his sincerity, and his good-fellowship. His heart was never lifted up above his brethren. His freedom from religious prejudice was shown by his numerous friendships with men of our creed, and his magnanimity by his reception of the Boer Generals fresh from battle with his people ; a magnanimity and broad-mindedness which were as respect-compelling as the wonderful witchery of his courtesy was irresistible. His popularity was the unconscious homage of all classes to the qualities that endear man to man, to a supreme tact, a genuine politeness of the heart, and that rare sympathy and consideration for others which is unquestionably the fruit and fine flower of British freedom. Well may the words of Rabbi Chanina be our consolation to-day, כל שרוח הבריות נוחה הימנו, רוח המקום נוחה הימנו, "He in whom the spirit of his fellow-creatures takes delight, in him will the Spirit of the Almighty take delight."

We must, however, call to mind not only his tireless

fidelity to the duties of his exalted position, the purity of his aims for the welfare of his people, but also his manifold labours for the welfare of all humanity. As Prince of Wales, his motto had been "Ich dien" (I serve); his reign was begun with the words, "As long as there is breath in my body I will work for the good and amelioration of my people"; and very faithfully was this vow fulfilled to the last, the very last day of his life on earth. "The righteous" the Rabbis tell us, "perform far more than they promise." At his accession no one foresaw the services he was to render to the cause of the world's peace. The Talmud speaks of fortunate men who achieve immortality by one deed, in an hour, as it were **יש קונה אחת עולמו בשעה אחת**; and we may well believe that the preservation of the peace of great nations is sufficient to merit immortal renown and the gratitude of mankind. It has been said that in literature the judgment of foreign nations resembles the verdict of posterity. Within certain limits, this also holds true in the sphere of politics. The foreign press spoke of him as of a great international Power, and named him "Edward the Peacemaker." And it is under this glorious title that he is likely to shine in the annals of the future. Again and again, he made his beneficent influence felt in the direction of international sanity, justice and peace. And now that he is gone, all feel that the world is poorer for the loss of his moderating influence, and gloomier for the absence of his deep

sympathy with suffering and persecuted humanity.

So far we have endeavoured to realise what we have lost; but it is as sacred a duty to realise what we have not lost, what we cannot lose—the example of this noble lover of Freedom, Justice and Humanity, whose ways were ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths were peace. His example remains with us for all time—an imperishable addition to the ideals and memories of the British nation. In many a heart it will implant the conviction that there are higher things in life than gold and pomp and power ; that during our brief journey from infinity to infinity, each one of us, no matter how humble his station in life, may, coral-like, add his share to the slowly-rising fabric of a better world—a world of triumphant Truth, realised Righteousness, and universal Peace.

“The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things ;
There is no armour against fate,
Death lays his icy hand on kings—
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.
All heads must come
To the cold tomb ;
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.”—AMEN.

In this hour of our nation's sorrow we have come unto Thee, Who art our Rock and our Redeemer forever, to offer our supplications unto Thee on behalf of the soul of our departed Sovereign, King Edward VII., who hath been gathered unto his people. O Father of life and death, in Whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of all flesh, with Thee is remission of sins, infinite compassion and life eternal. Take, we beseech Thee, his soul into Thy keeping; have mercy upon him, and pardon all his transgressions, for no mortal man is sinless before Thee. Remember unto him his strivings and yearnings for the good of his people and the brotherhood of man, and grant him his recompense for all the righteousness and peace which he wrought while on earth. Lift up the light of Thy countenance unto him, and vouchsafe unto him of the abounding happiness that is treasured up for those who walk in Thy ways of loving-kindness and truth before the children of men. O Lord, Who healest the broken-hearted and bindest up their wounds, grant Thy heavenly consolation unto the bereaved widow, Queen Alexandra, unto our most gracious Sovereign King George V., and unto all the mourners of the Royal Family. Be with them in this hour of their bitter grief, and cause the staff of Thy love to guide and comfort them as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. "He will destroy death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; for the Lord hath spoken it." AMEN.



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